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ABSTRACT

This study used an ecological framework to examine predictors of paternal involvement in urban Head Start programs among 134 fathers and father figures with preschool-age children. Paternal involvement measures included teacher and father perceptions of participation, as well as amount of time as obtained from daily record sheets. The findings of the study indicated that characteristics of the child, father, family, and Head Start program predicted paternal involvement in Head Start. Fathers were more involved with their sons and with Head Start sites that provided programmatic support for male involvement. Involvement was also positively related to paternal nurturance and mother involvement in Head Start. The results also suggested that teachers were better judges than fathers of the amount of involvement in Head Start. Findings pose implications for Head Start programs. (Contains 59 references.) (Author/KB)

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December 1999

by

Jay Fagan
Temple University

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3700 Walnut Street, Box 58
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Graduate School of Education
University of Pennsylvania
3700 Walnut Street, Box 58
Philadelphia, PA 19104-6216

Telephone: 215.573.5500
Fax: 215.573.5508
Http://www.ncoff.gse.upenn.edu
E-mail: mailbox@ncoff.gse.upenn.edu

Director: Vivian L. Gadsden, Ph.D.

PREFACE

Not since the 1960s and 1970s—when research in the field was at a peak—have family issues captured as much attention or sparked as much wide-scale debate as they have in recent years. Casting its net to address a variety of problems that fall outside the typical domains of psychology and sociology (where much of the early work was located), research on families is part of a growing interdisciplinary focus which is no longer simply implicated in questions about family development. Rather, the present interdisciplinary focus of the field attempts to respond to massive changes in the needs, structures, poverty levels, and formation patterns of families and the policies that are designed to remedy the increasingly complex problems they face.

A significant and compelling part of research on families over the past 20 years explores the impact of father involvement and father absence on children's development and complements much of the existing research on issues in other areas—e.g., female-headed households, poverty, social welfare, and public policy. In particular, the potential impact of family support legislation, national welfare reform agendas, and persistent systemic problems at local and state levels lend a sense of urgency to the research discussion about father participation in families. What is noticeably lacking in these discussions, however, is a focus on programs that serve fathers and families and the voices of practitioners.

The issues defining and surrounding research and practice on fathers and families are complex. Nested in each issue are multiple layers of questions about the problems facing young fathers, mothers, and families; the needs of programs and the practitioners who work in them; changes in national, state, and local policies; and the nature of the tasks facing society. Although there is substantial discussion about the impact of father absence, research studies provide only modest evidence for the negative consequences of father absence on children and typically attribute these negative effects to reduced family income resulting from separation or divorce. There are only sparse data on families that deviate from "traditional, intact" family forms such as families headed by adolescent or young, adult never-married, and/or poor mothers. Research on families of color, outside of poverty studies, are still conspicuously meager in the knowledge base.

The work of the National Center on Fathers and Families (NCOFF) uses the strengths and voids in these research discussions as a launching pad to develop a framework for research, practice, and policy—to promote the building of a field in which the needs of children and families are the core of the discourse and research and practice cohere to craft the language and activities associated with that discourse. NCOFF aims to bring together these issues within a research and collaborative effort on behalf of children and their families.

Established in July 1994 with core funding from The Annie E. Casey Foundation, NCOFF's mission is to improve the life chances of children and the efficacy of families by facilitating the effective involvement of fathers. Developed in the spirit of the Philadel-

phia Children's Network's (PCN) motto, "Help the children. Fix the system.", NCOFF seeks to increase and enrich the possibilities for children, ensuring that they are helped and that the system allows for and encourages the participation of fathers in their children's lives. NCOFF shares with PCN and other field activities the premises that children need loving, nurturing families; that mothers and families in general need to be supported in providing nurturance; and that family support efforts should increase the ability of both parents and adults within and outside the biological family to contribute to children's development and well-being.

NCOFF's mission is developed around seven **Core Learnings**. The Core Learnings provide the context for NCOFF's research agenda. This research agenda is intended to support the field in the development, conduct, and advancement of research, practice, and responsive policies. Research activities are designed to synthesize work from multiple disciplines, provide current analyses, and examine emerging conceptualizations in the field. In this and all of its work, NCOFF recognizes that the scope of need in the field requires a variety of approaches and the commitment and collective effort of different communities.

This Monograph is intended to highlight critical and emerging topics in the field that have received minimal attention and that complement issues identified in the NCOFF FatherLit Database, Briefs, critical literature reviews, and research reports. The Database combines citation lists, annotated bibliographies, and abstracts of research articles, reports, and volumes that focus on issues implied in the Core Learnings. All NCOFF documents are written and reviewed by scholars representing multiple disciplines and research interests in fathers and families. Information about the NCOFF Database, the literature reviews and analyses, working papers, and other NCOFF documents and activities is currently available on HandsNet and through our website.

Embedded in NCOFF's mission is a vision in which fathers, families, and communities are positioned to ensure the well-being of children and are able to translate their hope and the possibilities that accompany that hope into human and social prosperity. A well-coordinated national effort on fathers and families will give support and a collective voice to programs, encourage research, and contribute to responsive policy formulation. Such a vehicle would provide the appropriate context for experience-sharing among researchers, practitioners, and policymakers; identification of basic research, program, and policy-related issues; surfacing of new research issues; and increased opportunities for communication, cooperation, and collaboration.

Vivian L. Gadsden
Director

SEVEN CORE LEARNINGS

- Fathers care — even if that caring is not shown in conventional ways.
- Father presence matters — in terms of economic well-being, social support, and child development.
- Joblessness is a major impediment to family formation and father involvement.
- Existing approaches to public benefits, child support enforcement, and paternity establishment operate to create systemic obstacles and disincentives to father involvement. The disincentives are sufficiently compelling as to have prompted the emergence of a phenomenon dubbed "underground fathers"—men who acknowledge paternity and are involved in the lives of their children but who refuse to participate as fathers in the formal systems.
- A growing number of young fathers and mothers need additional support to develop the vital skills to share the responsibility for parenting.
- The transition from biological father to committed parent has significant developmental implications for young fathers.
- The behaviors of young parents, both fathers and mothers, are influenced significantly by intergenerational beliefs and practices within families of origin.

The seven Core Learnings are at the heart of NCOFF's agenda for research, practice, and policy and are a framework for the field. They represent the knowledge and experience of practitioners who confront complex problems facing fathers and families and are consistent with research across multiple disciplines. They offer an important lens through which policymakers might learn more about the implications and impact of legislation and policy decisions on the lives of large numbers of fathers, mothers, children, and families. Within them are captured salient issues experienced and felt deeply by a range of fathers and families—from those who are financially secure to those who are the most vulnerable to poverty and hardship.

The Core Learnings were identified immediately prior to NCOFF's inception by front-line practitioners in a series of survey and focus group activities conducted by the Philadelphia Children's Network and NCOFF. Formulated first as seven hypotheses drawn from practitioners' experiences in programs serving fathers and families, each hypothesis was tested against existing published research and policy studies. As each hypothesis was borne out in the literature, it became a Core Learning. A library of information was developed for each. The resultant seven libraries now constitute the NCOFF FatherLit Database and include over 7,000 citations, annotations, and abstracts of research, available in written, diskette, and electronic form.

Predictors of Father and Father Figure Involvement in Pre-kindergarten Head Start

by Jay Fagan

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Abstract

This study used an ecological framework to examine predictors of paternal involvement in urban Head Start programs among 134 fathers and father figures with preschool-age children. Paternal involvement measures included teacher and father perceptions of participation, as well as amount of time obtained from daily record sheets. The findings of the study indicated that characteristics of the child, father, family, and Head Start program predict paternal involvement in Head Start. Specifically, fathers were more involved with their sons and with Head Start sites that provided programmatic support for male involvement. Involvement was also positively related to paternal nurturance and mother involvement in Head Start. The results also suggest that teachers are better judges than fathers of the amount of involvement in Head Start. Implications for Head Start programs are discussed.

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About The Author

Jay Fagan, Ph.D. is an Associate Professor of Social Work in the School of Social Administration at Temple University.

Predictors of Father and Father Figure Involvement in Pre-kindergarten Head Start

by Jay Fagan

There has been a growing interest in father and father figure involvement in Head Start during the past decade (Levine, 1993). Many Head Start programs around the country have started father/male involvement projects (Fagan & Stevenson, 1995; Filmore, 1998; Levine & Pitt, 1995). Despite the proliferation of these programs, practitioners continue to report that many men are reluctant to participate in Head Start activities (Fagan, 1996). At the present time, there is little available information regarding the characteristics of fathers and father figures who become involved in Head Start. This information is needed to assist agencies to plan more effective services for men.

The growing interest in male involvement in Head Start has been influenced by a number of factors. One factor has been the body of evidence suggesting the importance of paternal involvement to children. Recent research gives evidence of the relationship between children's social competence and paternal behavior and involvement (e.g., Hart, DeWolf, Wozniak, & Burts, 1992; Kennedy, 1992; Lewis, 1997; Snarey, 1993; Yogman, Kindlon, & Earls, 1995; Youngblade & Belsky, 1992). The negative effects on children of reduced contact with nonresidential fathers have also been extensively investigated (Amato, 1996; Amato & Rezac, 1994; Popenoe, 1996).

Another factor that has contributed to the growing interest in father involvement in Head Start is recent research on the association between paternal involvement and school-age children's academic achievement. Consistent with studies that have demonstrated positive effects of maternal participation in children's school activities (Bogenschneider, 1997; Epstein, 1985; Stevenson & Baker, 1987), research on fathers has demonstrated positive associations between involvement (e.g., helping with homework, participating in school decision making, volunteering in the classroom, monitoring children's progress) and children's academic outcomes (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Nord, Brimhall, & West, 1997). Findings from the early childhood literature also suggest an association between paternal involvement in early childhood programs and the early academic success of children. Fagan and Iglesias (1999) demonstrated positive effects of a father involvement program and level of fathers' Head Start involvement on preschool-age children's mathematics readiness.

Recent changes in federal welfare legislation also may be a factor contributing to the growing interest in paternal involvement in Head Start. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996, which requires parents (mostly mothers) receiving public assistance to be gainfully employed within two years, has placed greater demands on all family members, including fathers, to participate in the care giving and child rearing needs of young children. The new legislation has also specified as one of its objectives increasing children's access to both parents (Bernard, 1998).

An additional factor is the increasing recognition among practitioners and researchers of the presence of significant adult males in the lives of Head Start children. The profiles of Head Start children often have been generalized from Census Bureau data about children in poverty. According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census (1997), 60% of poor children lived in female-headed households with no husband present in 1995. These data have been used to promote the belief that poor children

are being raised without the presence of any significant adult males. These stereotypes have been particularly prevalent in the media's portrayal of African American and Hispanic American fathers (Allen & Connor, 1997). Several studies focusing specifically on Head Start families have provided a somewhat different picture of male presence. In a nationwide survey of Head Start programs serving poor families, Levine (1993) discovered that a man is present, whether he is the father, the mother's boyfriend, or another male relative, in approximately 60% of Head Start families. In a small sample study of 59 randomly selected female caregivers with children in urban, suburban, and rural Head Start programs, fathers or father figures were reported to be present in 75% of the households (Fagan, Newash, & Schlosser, in press). Almost all of the female caregivers reported a significant male's involvement, and almost one-half reported a second significant male's involvement, in their Head Start child's life.

Theoretical model

Researchers have noted that father involvement is a multifaceted and complex phenomenon (Coltrane, 1996; Lamb, 1986, 1997; Pleck, 1997). In an effort to better understand this complex phenomenon as it relates to low-income Head Start fathers, the present study used an ecological model to explore various predictors of father involvement in Head Start. According to the ecological framework, parental behavior occurs within the context of four levels of social systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The "microsystem" comprises the person's immediate environments such as the Head Start program or the child's behavior. The "mesosystem" refers to transactions between microsystems in which an individual participates. The "exosystem" consists of events that occur in immediate environments that do not directly involve the person. The "macrosystem" consists of remote environments that have an impact on individuals. While exosystem and macrosystem variables may have an impact on paternal involvement, this study only focused on microsystem and mesosystem variables pertaining to the child, family, Head Start program, and father. Specifically, the child variables examined in this study were gender and social behavior. The father variables included paternal education, employment, and parenting skills. The family variables included maternal involvement in Head Start and family structure. The Head Start variable was the presence of a father involvement program designed to increase the level of men's involvement in their child's Head Start.

Research has generally supported the hypothesis that fathers are more involved with their sons than daughters (Pleck, 1997). Some studies have suggested that the differential between paternal involvement with sons and daughters grows larger as children age (Roopnarine & Ahmeduzzaman, 1993). The gender differential also seems to be related to the type of activity with children. Fathers have been shown to engage in more play activity with sons than with daughters, but there is little to no difference in the amount of time spent with sons or daughters in caretaking (Levy-Shiff & Israelashvilli, 1988).

Children's social behavior is also explored in relation to paternal involvement in Head Start. Most research on parent involvement has focused on the impact of school involvement on children's academic achievement or classroom behavior. Pleck (1997) has noted that few studies have examined the influence of child behavior on paternal involvement with children. While not directly related to paternal involvement with preschoolers, child temperament studies have shown that mothers avoid social interactions, provide less sensory stimulation, are less responsive, and engage in fewer teaching efforts with temperamentally difficult children than with easy children (Klein, 1984; Peters-Martin & Wachs, 1984; Maccoby, Snow, & Jacklin, 1984). These studies seem to suggest that behaviors that are more extreme or are perceived by fathers as being problematic may be associated with less paternal involvement. Moreover, paternal involvement in Head Start may be directly influenced by fathers' perceptions that their children have problematic behaviors, or it may be indirectly influenced by teachers' concerns about the child's behavior. In an exploratory study of half-day nurs-

eries, full day child care centers, and Head Start programs, Powell and Stremmel (1987) found that teachers expect parents to use the information provided to them to reinforce classroom learning.

As for paternal variables, the father's labor force participation may have a significant impact on his involvement with children. The time availability hypothesis suggests that persons who have more "free" time, often measured as less time involved in paid labor, are likely to be more available to do housework and child care work (Becker, 1981). Thus, it can be expected that fathers who are unemployed will have more time to spend with their children (e.g., Radin & Harold-Goldsmith, 1989). In families in which the mother is employed and the father is not, the father may play a critical role in bringing the child to and from the Head Start program and in communicating with staff.

Existing studies have shown that parental education is positively associated with parent involvement in children's schools (Stevenson & Baker, 1987). Less educated parents may feel more intimidated by the school setting and therefore may avoid participating in school activities (Nord, Brimhall, & West, 1997). More educated parents may have higher aspirations for their children and believe that their participation in children's schooling has the potential to assist children to reach their goals (Eccles & Harold, 1996).

Fathers' own characteristics may influence the level of their involvement with children. Researchers have suggested that fathers who are more skilled at parenting are likely to be more directly involved with their children (Crouter, Perry-Jenkins, Huston, & McHale, 1987; Lamb, 1986). Skills such as nurturance of children may give fathers the self-confidence and motivation needed to have a higher level of engagement with children.

While there are many potentially important family variables that may influence paternal involvement in Head Start, this study focused on mothers' involvement in Head Start and family structure. Research has shown that fathers' involvement in their children's schools is positively associated with mothers' involvement (Nord, Brimhall, & West, 1997). The close association between levels of maternal and paternal involvement in school may be a manifestation of the parents' shared values regarding the importance of education (Nord, Brimhall, & West, 1997).

Theories of evolutionary biology suggest that biological fathers are more likely to be involved with genetic offspring than they are with biologically unrelated children. According to this perspective, genetic relatedness is necessary for the development of paternal interest in children (Lamb, Pleck, & Charnov, 1985). In support of evolutionary theory, Marsiglio (1991) found that White and non-White fathers who had only biological children at home played with their young children significantly more often than fathers who had only stepchildren at home.

Numerous studies have examined the relationship between the father's residential status and his involvement with his children. As expected, these studies have shown that nonresidential fathers spend less time with their children than residential fathers. Nord, Brimhall, and West (1997) found that nonresident fathers are substantially less involved in their children's schools than are resident fathers. However, they also indicated that the involvement of nonresident fathers is by no means trivial.

The ecological model emphasizes the importance of environmental influences on parent involvement. Size of the school has been shown to have a strong negative influence on levels of parental involvement (Zill & Nord, 1994). Other factors that are related to parental involvement are school policies and teacher attitudes (Epstein, 1990). A positive school climate has also been shown to correlate with paternal involvement in children's schools (Nord, Brimhall, & West, 1997). The present study examined the impact of a father involvement program initiative on fathers' participation in Head Start.

There has been little consensus in the research literature about the definition of parent involvement (Powell, 1989; Scott-Jones, 1984). Reynolds (1992) defines parent involvement as

direct participation in the child's school or any interactions between parents and children that may contribute to the child's development. Other researchers have limited the definition to actual participation in the early childhood setting (Parker, Piotrkowski, Kessler-Sklar, Baker, Peay, & Clark, 1998). The source of report about parent involvement is also an issue. Parents may underreport or overreport their level of involvement (Reynolds, 1992). Entwisle and Hayduk (1982) found that teachers often provide valid reports of school participation. Few studies have used other strategies to measure parent involvement, such as observation or daily records of the amount of involvement. The present study used several different methods to assess involvement (daily records of time and rating scales) and obtained data from different sources (fathers and teachers).

To review, the present study hypothesized that fathers would be more involved in Head Start if they had a son as opposed to a daughter in the program. The lack of available information on the influence of child behavior on parental involvement necessitated an exploratory approach to examining the relationship between these two variables. Paternal Head Start involvement was examined in relation to fathers' and teachers' perceptions of the child's social behavior. It was expected that paternal involvement would be positively associated with fathers' unemployment, level of education, and nurturance. This study hypothesized that fathers would be more involved in Head Start if the mother also spent time participating in the program. Biologically related fathers were expected to be more involved with their children than with non-biologically related children, and residential fathers were expected to be more involved than are non-residential fathers. It was also expected that father involvement would vary by the presence of a specialized program to increase paternal participation. Finally, this study explored the relationship between different measures of paternal Head Start involvement.

Method

Participants

This study was conducted as part of a larger investigation of the impact of a father involvement program on fathers, father figures, and their pre-kindergarten Head Start children. The subjects recruited for this study were any interested fathers or father figures with children in eight Head Start sites located in urban public elementary schools. All of the sites were administered by the same Head Start agency. The only criteria for participation in this study was that the man had to be significantly involved in the care, rearing, and support of the Head Start child within the context of the family. Thus, the participants of this study could be grandfathers, uncles, biological fathers, stepfathers, or partners to the Head Start child's mother.

One hundred and thirty-four fathers and father figures were recruited for this study (see Table 1). The majority of the men were African American (65.7%). A large number of fathers were Latino American (27.4%). On average, fathers and father figures completed high school. Slightly more than half (58.1%) of the respondents participated in the labor force. The median total family income of participating fathers was $10,000 per year. The majority of men were biological (67.8%) and residential (65%) fathers. Most reported being single, never married (59.6%), although a substantial number of men were married only once (27.4%).

Twenty-three teachers from 23 classrooms also participated in this study. All participating teachers had earned at least a Bachelor's degree and were certified in early childhood education. Seventeen teachers reported being white European American and six teachers reported being African American. Only one teacher was male.

Procedures

Two cohorts of subjects were recruited. One cohort was recruited in October 1995, and the second cohort was obtained in October 1996. A variety of procedures were used to recruit fathers and father figures from Head Start sites. The staff of

the project (1) distributed notices to fathers and mothers inviting them to participate, (2) met with parents outside of the children's classrooms during drop-off and pick-up, and (3) contacted fathers and father figures who did not drop-off or pick-up by telephone. Teachers and aides also helped to recruit fathers and father figures for the project. Information regarding the entire population of fathers and father figures in the participating Head Start centers was unavailable because some mothers were unwilling to share information about the significant men in their family, and some mothers did not want the father or father figure to be involved in the project.

Men who agreed to participate in the study were interviewed twice—once in October and again between mid-May and mid-June. The face-to-face interviews involved administering a series of questionnaires to obtain data on predictors of father involvement in Head Start (fall interview) and on fathers' self-perceptions of their Head Start involvement (spring interview). All interviews were conducted in the Head Start program by either an African American or Latino American interviewer. Mothers and fathers were always interviewed separately. Participants received $30 in appreciation for their time.

Description of the Intervention

Of the 134 fathers recruited for this study, 50 were in the comparison group and 84 were in the father involvement intervention group. The intervention program involved adapting traditional Head Start parent involvement activities for fathers and father figures. The program components included: (1) father volunteering in the classroom; (2) special educational projects carried out by fathers and staff in the Head Start classroom (Father's Day Program); (3) father sensitivity training for early childhood staff members; (4) father support groups; and (5) father-child recreation activities.

The purpose of the Father's Day Program was to encourage fathers to read to and play with their children using educationally relevant materials and to increase the amount of father volunteering in the classroom. The activities were intended to be compatible with the talents and interests of the men in the program and to correspond with the classroom curriculum. In those instances in which fathers had difficulty reading to their children, we made use of books without words. For example, in celebration of Black History month, the men planned an activity about Jackie Robinson. They talked with the children and read a book about the legendary baseball player, after which they made and played with baseballs constructed from newspaper. In conjunction with the Head Start program's curriculum on the winter season, the fathers and children built igloos from large cardboard boxes, read stories about Eskimos, and examined pictures showing how igloos are built from ice.

Father support groups were conducted monthly in the evening so that working fathers could attend. The first topic that was discussed during these meetings was the meaning of fatherhood, which included exploring men's feelings about childhood, relationships with one's father, one's experiences as a father, beliefs about being a "good" father, and positive forms of involvement with children. Mother-father relations was the second topic of discussion, including barriers that mothers and fathers may experience in male/female relationships and strategies for resolving dilemmas in male/female relationships. The third session was devoted to children's self-esteem and the importance of paternal nurturance and responsiveness for developing children's self-esteem. The fourth unit focused on language and literacy, with particular emphasis on how to use books to develop children's language and school readiness. The final session on positive behavioral control addressed use of rewards, ignoring undesirable behavior, and time-out.

Father-child recreation activities were a major component of this project. Trips included cookouts in the park, fun days at the University, a swim party, a trip to an indoor activity center, and basketball games. The staff sensitivity sessions were intended to address teachers' and aides' biases about father/male involvement. Staff members were also trained to use effective strategies for engaging men in Head Start.

Instruments

Predictor variables.

Information regarding the father's parenting skills was obtained from the abbreviated version of the Parenting Dimensions Inventory (PDI; Slater & Power, 1987). The PDI assesses eight dimensions of parenting. Only the parental nurturance scale was used in this study. The nurturance scale consists of a series of descriptive statements and a six-point response format ranging from "not at all descriptive of me" (1) to "highly descriptive of me" (6). A sample item from this scale is, "I encourage my child to talk about his (or her) troubles." The authors of the instrument report an acceptable level of internal consistency on the nurturance scale (Slater & Power, 1987; Power, 1993). The Cronbach's alpha for fathers in this study was .60. As for validity, the PDI has been shown to predict similar measures of parenting with a sample of low-income, urban African American mothers (Kelley, Power, & Wimbush, 1992).

The preschool version of the Social Skills Rating System (SSRS; Gresham & Elliott, 1990) was used to assess teachers' and parents' perceptions of the child's social problem behaviors. The Problem Behavior domain of the SSRS includes 10 problem-oriented items rated according to the frequency of the behavior's occurrence (never, sometimes, very often). The Problem Behavior domain contains two factors on the parent and teacher form-internalizing and externalizing behavior. Fantuzzo, Mantz, and McDermott (1996) have investigated the reliability and validity of the teacher and parent versions of the SSRS with urban Head Start children. Their factor analysis study replicated the internalizing and externalizing factors for the parent and teacher versions.

Criterion variables.

Parent involvement is a regular component of all Head Start programs. Fathers as well as mothers are encouraged to volunteer in the classroom, participate in trips, and attend workshops. Because the activities of parent involvement are similar to the activities of the father involvement intervention program, it seemed appropriate to assess amount of Head Start involvement among fathers in the both the comparison and intervention groups. Data regarding father involvement in the program were obtained from the sign-in sheets completed by fathers when they participated in the classroom, attended meetings or workshops, met with teachers, accompanied children on trips and outings, or participated in other special activities that are related to the Head Start program. Fathers were asked to sign their names on the volunteer sheet and to indicate the start and ending time of their involvement. The research staff collected the data from each Head Start classroom on a monthly basis, starting in November through the end of May. The total number of hours of participation was then calculated for each father for the school year. Hours of participation are henceforth referred to as recorded time.

The revised Parent Involvement in School (Taylor & Machida, 1994) was also administered to fathers and teachers at the end of the school year. Fathers were asked to report about their own involvement in Head Start. Teachers completed the Parent Involvement in School scale for fathers and mothers. This scale asks the respondent to indicate about how often the parent volunteers in the classroom, responds to requests for information about the child, attends parent meetings, follows through with activities suggested by the teacher, tells the teacher when the child is sick, and tells the teacher about things that happen to the child outside of the program. The items are rated on a five-point scale from consistently (5) to never (1). Total scores could range from five to fifteen, with high scores indicating greater levels of parent involvement. The internal consistency of this scale was .85 for fathers' self-perceptions of Head Start involvement, .92 for teachers' perceptions of father involvement, and .91 for teachers' perceptions of mother involvement.

Results

Comparison of fathers and father figures in the treatment programs

A series of t tests and chi squares were conducted to determine if fathers in the intervention and comparison groups differed from each other on any demographic variables (see Table 1). There were no significant group differences. The comparison group contained more Latino American and African American fathers than the intervention group, but these differences were not significant. There were no significant group differences on the number of fathers who resided in their Head Start child's household. The treatment groups were also similar on child gender, paternal education, and family income.

A series of t tests and chi squares were also conducted to rule out cohort effects on paternal involvement in Head Start or on any of the predictor variables (paternal nurturance, child behavior problems, father's education, maternal involvement in Head Start, child gender, biological father status, and residential status). The first cohort of fathers participated in the study between October 1995 and June 1996. The second cohort participated between October 1996 and June 1997. These findings are not summarized in a table. There were no significant cohort differences for any of the paternal involvement variables or predictor variables.

Father and father figure involvement in Head Start

On average, fathers and father figures in the study spent a total of 21.51 hours (SD= 82.41) participating in the Head Start program over the course of seven months (November through May). The number of hours of participation ranged from zero to 409 hours. Sixty-five fathers (48.1%) did not spend any time participating in the Head Start program during the course of the school year (see Table 2). A majority of comparison group fathers (73%) spent no time in the Head Start program, whereas a much smaller, yet substantial, percentage of intervention group fathers (33%) spent no time in the program. Ten fathers (7.4%) spent from one to two hours participating in Head Start. Thirty-three fathers (24.4%) spent from three to 10 hours in the program. Again, a larger proportion of intervention group fathers (30%) than comparison fathers (16%) spent from three to 10 hours in the program. Three fathers (2%) spent from 11 to 21.51 hours (mean) in the program. Twenty-three fathers (five from the comparison and 18 from the intervention group) spent more than 21.51 hours participating in the program.

The average total score for self-perceptions of paternal involvement in Head Start was 16.55 (SD=4.06, range=7 to 25). This score represents a mean item score of 3.31, which suggests that fathers perceived themselves to be slightly more than occasionally involved in Head Start. The mean total score for teacher perceptions of father involvement was 13.12 (SD=6.24, range= 5 to 25). The average item score on the teacher scale was 2.62, which suggests that teachers perceived fathers to be slightly less than occasionally involved in the program.

Comparison of fathers with no involvement and fathers with any involvement

The next set of analyses compared fathers with no involvement and fathers with any involvement (i.e., more than zero hours) in Head Start. Table 3 shows that the no involvement and any involvement groups were not significantly different on demographic variables. There were also no group differences on paternal nurturance, maternal Head Start involvement, father perceptions of child behavior, and teacher perceptions of child behavior. There was a significant treatment group difference. Fathers in the male involvement intervention program were far more likely to spend any time in Head Start than were fathers in the comparison group, $X^2(1)= 19.55$, $p= .00001$.

The relationship between measures of Head Start involvement

Pearson correlation coefficients were conducted to examine the relationships between the Head Start involvement variables. There was a significant but low-level correlation between re-

corded time and father self-perceptions of Head Start involvement, r(132)= .23, p= .05. There was a significant but low-level association between recorded time and teacher perceptions of father involvement in Head Start, r(132)= .27, p= .01. There was also a significant but weak relationship between self-perceived involvement and teacher perceptions of Head Start involvement, r(132)= .26, p= .01. These findings are consistent with those reported by Reynolds (1992) who also found a low level of congruence between teacher and parent ratings of parental involvement in school.

While the correlational findings of this study suggest a low level of agreement between measures of paternal involvement, a different picture emerged when the amount of recorded involvement was dichotomized into no time versus any time. A series of t-tests were conducted to determine if there were significant group differences for no involvement fathers and any involvement fathers on self-perceived Head Start involvement or teacher perceptions of Head Start involvement.

There were no between group differences associated with fathers' self-perceived involvement, t(132)= -1.51, p=.133. Fathers who had no recorded time in Head Start perceived themselves to be occasionally involved in the program (M= 3.24, SD= .82). Fathers who spent any time in the program perceived themselves to be slightly more than occasionally involved in Head Start (M= 3.41, SD= .80). Teachers, on the other hand, had significantly different perceptions of fathers who spent no time in the program versus fathers who spent any time in the program, t(132)= -4.72, p<.001. Fathers who had no recorded time in Head Start were perceived by teachers to be seldom involved in the program (M= 2.07, SD= 1.19). Fathers who spent any time in the program were perceived by teachers to be occasionally involved in Head Start (M= 3.06, SD= 1.11).

Predictors of Head Start involvement—bivariate analyses

Table 4 shows that only a small number of predictors were significantly related to father involvement in Head Start. The Pearson correlation coefficient between paternal nurturance and recorded time was significant but small. Nurturance was the only significant predictor of self-perceived father involvement. The relationship between maternal and paternal involvement in Head Start, as perceived by teachers, was significant and moderate. Finally, teachers reported higher levels of father involvement in Head Start if the child had fewer behavior problems at the beginning of the school year.

Predictors of Head Start involvement—multivariate analyses

Multiple regression procedures were used to examine factors that were hypothesized to predict paternal participation in Head Start (see Table 5). All predictor variables were entered simultaneously into each regression equation, with recorded time, self-perceived involvement, or teacher perceptions as the criterion variables.

The first set of analyses examined predictors of fathers' actual recorded time spent volunteering in the Head Start program. The analyses showed that fathers and father figures were significantly more likely to spend time in Head Start if they had a son in the program than a daughter. On average, fathers spent 16.15 hours more with sons than with daughters in Head Start. Fathers' self-perceived nurturance of children at the beginning of the academic year was positively associated with paternal time spent in Head Start. The analyses also showed that intervention group fathers spent significantly more time in the program than comparison group fathers. On the average, intervention group fathers spent 16.11 hours more per year in the program than comparison group fathers. Finally, there was a trend for fathers to spend more time in Head Start if the mother was also highly involved in the program.

Paternal nurturance at the beginning of the school year was the only variable that predicted fathers' self-perceived involvement in Head Start. Fathers with sons did not perceive themselves to be more involved in the program than fathers with daughters. Maternal involvement in Head Start was also unrelated to self-perceived father involvement.

There was a moderate relationship between teachers' perceptions of maternal involvement in the program and teachers' rating of father involvement in Head Start. Teachers also perceived fathers to be more involved with their sons than with their daughters. Finally, children with fewer behavior problems, as perceived by teachers, were more likely to have involved fathers. Paternal nurturance, education, and employment were unrelated to teachers' perceptions of the man's Head Start involvement.

Discussion

The present study used an ecological model to examine predictors of father and father figure involvement in Head Start. The focus of the study was on microsystem and mesosystem variables that were expected to influence paternal involvement. The findings supported the ecological model by confirming that paternal involvement in Head Start is related to characteristics of the child, father, family, and Head Start program. Fathers who had their children in Head Start programs with special male involvement initiatives were significantly more likely to spend any time (more than zero hours) in the program than fathers who had their children in programs with no such initiatives. While characteristics of the child, father, and family did not predict whether fathers spent any time in Head Start, these variables were significantly related to amount of participation, when amount was treated as a continuous variable. Fathers spent significantly more time in the program with their sons than with their daughters. Teachers also perceived fathers to be more involved with sons than daughters. There was a significant and negative relationship between teachers' ratings of child behavior problems and teachers' perceptions of father involvement in Head Start. Fathers' self-perceived nurturance predicted actual time and self-perceptions of Head Start involvement. As for family variables, maternal involvement in Head Start was significantly predictive of paternal involvement.

While the findings of this study confirmed the hypothesis that fathers would spend more time in the program with their sons than with their daughters, it was interesting to note that fathers did not perceive themselves to be differentially involved with male and female children. Fathers' self-perceptions of being equally involved with sons and daughters may reflect their desire to be available to children regardless of gender. Fathers' attitudes and beliefs about their involvement with sons versus daughters has received little attention in the research literature and may be important to study considering the results of large-scale meta-analyses that have been inconclusive about whether fathers treat sons differently from daughters (Lytton & Romney, 1991; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974).

As predicted, the present study confirmed the expected relationship between child behavior problems and paternal Head Start involvement, but only in relation to teachers' perceptions of these two variables. Caution needs to be exercised in interpreting these data. It is entirely possible that teachers' perceptions of father involvement in Head Start were influenced by their perceptions of the child's behavior. In particular, teachers who perceive children to have behavior problems may be biased toward thinking that their fathers are not sufficiently involved with the child. Considering the lack of significant relationship between teachers' perceptions of child behavior and fathers' actual or self-perceived involvement in Head Start, it does not seem likely that teachers' assessments of the child have an impact on paternal involvement.

Fathers' perceptions of the child's behavior did not predict self-perceived Head Start involvement, the actual amount of time spent in the program, or teachers' ratings of paternal involvement. These findings are difficult to interpret. It is possible that fathers in the study did not think that becoming involved in the program would have a positive impact on their child's behavior. Another interpretation is that fathers believed the program is responsible for dealing with behavior problems. Alternatively, fathers may have thought that they could best deal with the child's behavior problems at home rather than in the Head Start program. Fathers also may have thought that their children's behavior problems are transient and will decrease as the children mature.

It is noteworthy that the child behavior checklist was administered to caregivers early in the school year. Parent and teacher perceptions of the child's social behavior may change during the course of the school year. Paternal involvement in Head Start may in turn increase or decrease in relation to variations in adult concerns about the child over the course of time. Future research should include repeated measures of child behavior to determine if changes in paternal involvement are sensitive to changing perceptions of the child.

This study hypothesized that paternal education, labor force participation, and nurturance would predict fathers' involvement in Head Start. Self-perceived nurturance was the only variable that predicted recorded time and self-perceptions of Head Start involvement. The connection between nurturance and Head Start involvement found in this study is consistent with previous research showing that nurturant fathers tend to be more involved with their children at home.

Much past research has suggested that there is a strong link between level of parents' education and parental participation in the support of children's learning. The findings of this study did not support this link. Fathers in the current study who completed less formal education may have viewed their participation in Head Start as an opportunity to encourage their children to receive the education that they missed. Thus, fathers with varying levels of education may have been equally involved in the child's Head Start.

The hypothesized relationship between labor force participation and Head Start involvement was not supported by this study. Fathers who seemingly had more available time due to unemployment were not more likely to spend time in the program. Previous studies of father involvement have shown that mothers' employment status and hours spent in paid work may have a greater influence on paternal involvement than the father's own employment status or hours (Coltrane, 1996; Fagan, 1998). As mothers become less available to their children, greater demands may be placed on fathers to become directly involved with their children in a variety of activities. These fathers may realize that their children's needs are not going to be met unless they are directly involved in meeting those needs. Mothers who are employed in paid work and who spend more hours at work also may be in a more powerful position relative to their spouse or partner. Parents who have more power may be able to avoid doing work such as child care which has less prestige and appeal than market work, and they may also have greater influence over their husband's or partner's direct involvement with the children.

Of the three family-related variables considered in this study, only maternal involvement in Head Start was significantly predictive of paternal involvement. These findings would seem to support the hypothesis that parents share values regarding the importance of education (Nord, Brimhall, & West, 1997). Neither the biological or residential status of the father or father figure was related to paternal involvement in Head Start. The empirical literature has repeatedly shown associations between these two variables and father involvement with children. However, there is an emerging literature showing that in some communities patterns of father involvement do not identically follow the patterns found in the larger population. For example, nonresident African American fathers have more daily contact with their children than do nonresident white, Mexican-American, or Puerto Rican fathers (Stier &Tienda, 1993). Others have suggested that being biologically related to one's child may not be the only pathway to becoming a social father among ethnic minority fathers (Roopnarine, in press).

As predicted, fathers spent significantly more time in their child's Head Start center if the program had a specialized intervention project designed to increase paternal participation. On average, fathers in the intervention sites spent 16.11 hours more over the course of the school year than fathers in sites with no specialized program for men. The size of the intervention effect was approximately the same as the effect of child gender on father involvement in Head Start. While the effect of the intervention on amount of paternal Head Start involvement was significant but small,

at least when Head Start involvement was treated as a continuous variable, the findings of this study also revealed that the effect of the intervention was much greater when amount of involvement was treated as a dichotomous variable (no time versus any time). Closer examination of the data reveals that five men in the comparison group spent a substantial amount of time in their child's Head Start program. If these five fathers are eliminated from the analyses, then intervention group fathers spent 20 hours rather than 16.11 hours more than comparison group fathers.

The findings of this study also indicated significant, low-level correlations between recorded time, father perceptions of Head Start involvement, and teacher perceptions of involvement. However, a somewhat different picture emerged when recorded time was dichotomized into no time versus any time spent in Head Start. There was no significant relationship between father self-perceptions of amount of involvement and this dichotomized variable. On the other hand, there was a significant and strong relationship between teacher perceptions of father involvement and the dichotomized variable. These findings suggest that teachers may be better judges than fathers of time spent in Head Start, at least when time is categorized as any or none.

There are a number of significant limitations of the data that should be noted. The reliability coefficient on the self-report nurturance measure was moderate at best. It was noteworthy that the fathers and father figures who participated in this study were not the entire population of men in the Head Start programs. The men were either self-selected or encouraged by the child's mother to participate. Since some mothers were reluctant to share information about the significant men in their families, it was decided not to pursue data regarding all significant males. Without data on all fathers in the Head Start programs, it was not possible to determine whether the study sample was representative of the larger population. Another possible limitation of the study is that the majority of fathers in this project were African American or Hispanic American. Thus, the data may not be generalizable to fathers from other cultural groups.

Implications for practice

One implication of this study is that male involvement projects have the potential to increase father and father figure involvement in Head Start. However, practitioners should be cautioned that such projects are likely to result in low levels of involvement in the program. That is, a large number of fathers are likely to spend some time in the program, but a small number of fathers are likely to spend a large amount of time in the program. These issues should be taken into consideration in light of research findings that have shown that participation in a father involvement program is likely to have positive effects on fathers and children only when fathers become highly involved in the program (Fagan & Iglesias, 1999). Discussions among practitioners and researchers are needed at this time because it is not clear what are the goals of male involvement programs. Should programs expect fathers to be highly involved in their child's Head Start program, and if so for what reasons? Or should programs expect some fathers, such as men who need to improve their parenting skills, to become involved? These discussions are particularly relevant at this time considering the changing welfare regulations that require parents (mostly mothers) receiving public assistance to be gainfully employed after two years of receiving benefits.

The present study also demonstrated that vigorous outreach is needed to involve fathers/males in Head Start. Outreach efforts should take into consideration that men have many reasons for not getting involved in their child's early childhood program. Many fathers work in jobs that have little tolerance for taking time off, except when the father is sick. Fathers may lose income if they do not work. Fathers will also find excuses for not getting involved in the center. The excuses are usually a reflection of the man's discomfort with volunteering in the program. Men may say "no" two or three times, but say "yes" the fourth time, maybe just to get staff "off their back." Practitioners should not be surprised if the father/male who resisted them numerous times volunteers in the center and discovers that he really enjoys his visit.

Staff also should make a special effort to provide meaningful experiences for father/male involvement in Head Start. Too often, fathers receive little guidance from teachers about how to get involved in the classroom when they come to visit. Staff may expect fathers to initiate their own involvement in an activity or chore. This approach may work well with women, but it does not work very well with men. Men already have uncomfortable feelings even before they come into the center. They may feel that it is unmanly to volunteer in the early childhood program. Because of their lack of experience in the classroom, they are likely to be seen standing on the periphery of the room. Teachers can easily rectify this situation by planning activities that fathers could get involved in if they come into the classroom. Moreover, teachers should consider activities that have the potential to enhance the man's competencies in socializing his children. Another implication of this study is that programs may need to educate parents about the importance of fathers participating in their daughter's as well as their son's Head Start program. While many men still feel that they are mostly needed to socialize their sons, there is a growing body of literature showing that fathers have a significant impact on the developmental outcomes of their daughters as well.

The results of this study also suggest that men who already possess characteristics (nurturance) that are associated with involved parenting are more likely to participate in Head Start. Moreover, men whose wives or partners are very involved in Head Start are also more likely to participate in the program. These fathers may require the least amount of outreach to become involved in their child's program. Program staff should begin to think about strategies to encourage other fathers to participate, even though these men may be harder to involve. Programs may need to experiment with different strategies to determine which are most effective for harder-to-reach fathers and father figures.

Conclusions

Despite the growing interest in programs for fathers and other males in Head Start, practitioners and researchers report that many men are reluctant to participate in Head Start activities. This study provides data about the characteristics of fathers and father figures that become involved in their child's Head Start program. Four variables stand out as being significant predictors of paternal involvement—having a son rather than a daughter, paternal nurturance, maternal involvement in Head Start, and programmatic support. While larger scale studies with nationally representative samples are needed to make generalizations to all Head Start fathers, the findings of the current study are the first data to suggest which fathers are likely to become involved in their child's program.

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Table 1

Descriptive Statistics on Participant Characteristics

Variable	Entire sample (N=134)	Comparison (n=50)	Intervention (n=84)
Child's gender, n(%)			
Male	67 (50)	29 (58)	38 (45.2)
Female	67 (50)	21 (42)	46 (54.8)
Child's age, M (SD)	52.74 (7.16)	53.37 (7.60)	52.36 (6.91)
Father's age, M (SD)	32.86 (9.29)	32.24 (10.02)	33.24 (8.86)
Race/ethnicity, n(%)			
Asian	2 (1.5)	0	2 (2.4)
Latino	37 (27.6)	15 (30)	22 (26.2)
African American	86 (64.2)	35 (70)	51 (60.7)
White, not Hispanic	5 (3.7)	0	5 (6)
Other	4 (3.0)	0	4 (4.7)
Relationship to child, n(%)			
biological father	89 (66.5)	30 (60)	59 (70.2)
step-father	16 (11.9)	5 (10)	11 (13.1)
grandfather	8 (6)	5 (10)	3 (3.6)
uncle	15 (11.2)	6 (12)	9 (10.7)
mother's partner	6 (4.4)	4 (8)	2 (2.4)
Marital status of man, n (%)			
single, never married	75 (56)	29 (58)	46 (54.8)
separated	5 (3.7)	3 (6)	2 (2.4)
divorced	12 (9)	4 (8)	8 (9.5)
widowed	1 (0.7)	1 (2)	0 (0)
married only once	39 (29.2)	13 (26)	26 (31)
remarried	2 (1.4)	0 (0)	2 (2.3)
Father's education, median, SD	12 (2.34)	12 (1.88)	12 (2.58)
Father's residence, n (%)			
With Head Start child	95 (65)	35 (70)	60 (71.4)
Not with child	39 (35)	15 (30)	24 (38.5)
Father's labor force participation, n(%)			
Employed	77 (57.5)	25 (50)	52 (61.9)
Unemployed	57 (42.5)	25 (50)	32 (38.1)
Mother's labor force participation, n(%)			
Employed	28 (20.9)	9 (18)	19 (22.6)
Unemployed	106 (79.1)	41 (82)	65 (76.2)
Family income, median (SD)	$10,000 ($6,500)	$10,000 ($6,500)	$10,000 ($6,500)
Father's work hrs., M(SD)	38.81 (11.09)	39.04 (7.86)	38.71 (12.31)
Mother's work hrs., M(SD)	30.34 (10.99)	27.11 (14.16)	31.61 (9.56)

Note. t tests and chi squares revealed no significant differences between comparison and intervention participants. Data on mothers' and fathers' work hours were calculated only for mothers and fathers who were doing paid work.

Table 2

Amount of Time Spent in the Head Start Program

Amount of time	All fathers	Intervention	Comparison
	n(%)	n(%)	n(%)
0 hours	65 (48.1)	28 (33)	37 (73)
1-2 hours	10 (7.4%)	9 (11)	1 (2)
3-10 hours	33 (24.4%)	25 (30)	8 (16)
11-21.51 hours	3 (2%)	3 (4)	0
21.51-409 hours	24 (15.9%)	19 (23)	5 (10)

Table 3

Comparison of Fathers Who Spent No Time and Fathers Who Spent Any Time in Head Start

Variable	No Time	Any Time
	M (SD)	M (SD)
nurturance	32.72 (3.57)	33.34 (3.04)
maternal Head Start involvement	16.93 (5.54)	17.24 (5.32)
father perception of behavior problems	88.06 (17.84)	89.52 (19.36)
teacher perception of behavior problems	99.91 (11.0)	98.76 (13.49)
education	12.07 (1.83)	11.83 (2.73)
family income	4.22 (2.28)	3.71 (2.22)
biological father status (%)		
biological fathers	46	54
other fathers	51	49
employment status (%)		
employed fathers	51	49
unemployed fathers	45	55
child's gender (%)		
boys	44	56
girls	52	48
treatment group (%)		
intervention group	33	67
comparison group	73	27

Note. The only significant group difference was between treatment groups, $X^2(1)= 19.55$, $p= .00001$.

Table 4

Pearson Product Moment Correlations Between Paternal Involvement in Head Start and Predictor Variables

	Head Start involvement		
Predictors	Recorded time	Self-perceptions	Teacher perceptions
child gender	.14	-.01	.09
child behavior, father perceptions	-.13	-.05	-.02
child behavior, teacher perceptions	-.05	-.04	.17
paternal education	.01	-.10	.05
employment	.07	.05	.06
nurturance	.19*	.39**	.07
mother's H.S. involvement	.12	-.01	.37**
biological father status	.07	-.03	.04
residential father status	.12	-.09	-.10
treatment group	.11	.03	.10

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 5

Multiple Regression Analyses of Predictors of Father Involvement in Head Start

Independent Variables	Dependent Variables: Unstandardized (and Standardized) Regression Coefficients		
	Amount of Time	Self-Perceptions	Teacher Perceptions
Child			
child gender[a]	16.15 (.19)**	.89 (.11)	2.55 (.21)**
child's behavior, paternal perceptions	-.24 (-.10)	.01 (.03)	.04 (.14)
child's behavior, teacher perceptions	-.09 (-.02)	-.02 (-.07)	-.10 (-.20)**
Father			
education	-.35 (-.02)	-.12(-.07)	.08 (.03)
employment[b]	9.54 (.11)	1.01 (.12)	1.05 (.09)
nurturance	2.75 (.21)**	.54 (.45)****	.21 (.12)
Family			
mother's H.S. involvement	1.44 (.17)*	-.01 (-.01)	.45 (.40)****
biological father vs. other[c]	6.85 (.07)	.31 (.04)	1.35 (.10)
residential father[d]	15.37 (.15)	.64 (.07)	1.51 (.10)
Head Start			
treatment group[e]	16.11 (.19)**	.69 (.08)	1.26 (.10)
R^2	.15	.21	.25
F	1.75*	2.25**	3.36***

[a] 1=girls, 2=boys
[b] 1=employed, 2=unemployed
[c] 1=biological father, 2=other
[d] 1=nonresidential father/father figure, 2=residential father/father figure
[e] 1=comparison group, 2=intervention group

* p<.10. ** p<.05. *** p<.001. **** p<.0001.